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# McCormick Theological Seminary

## The Westminster Celebration

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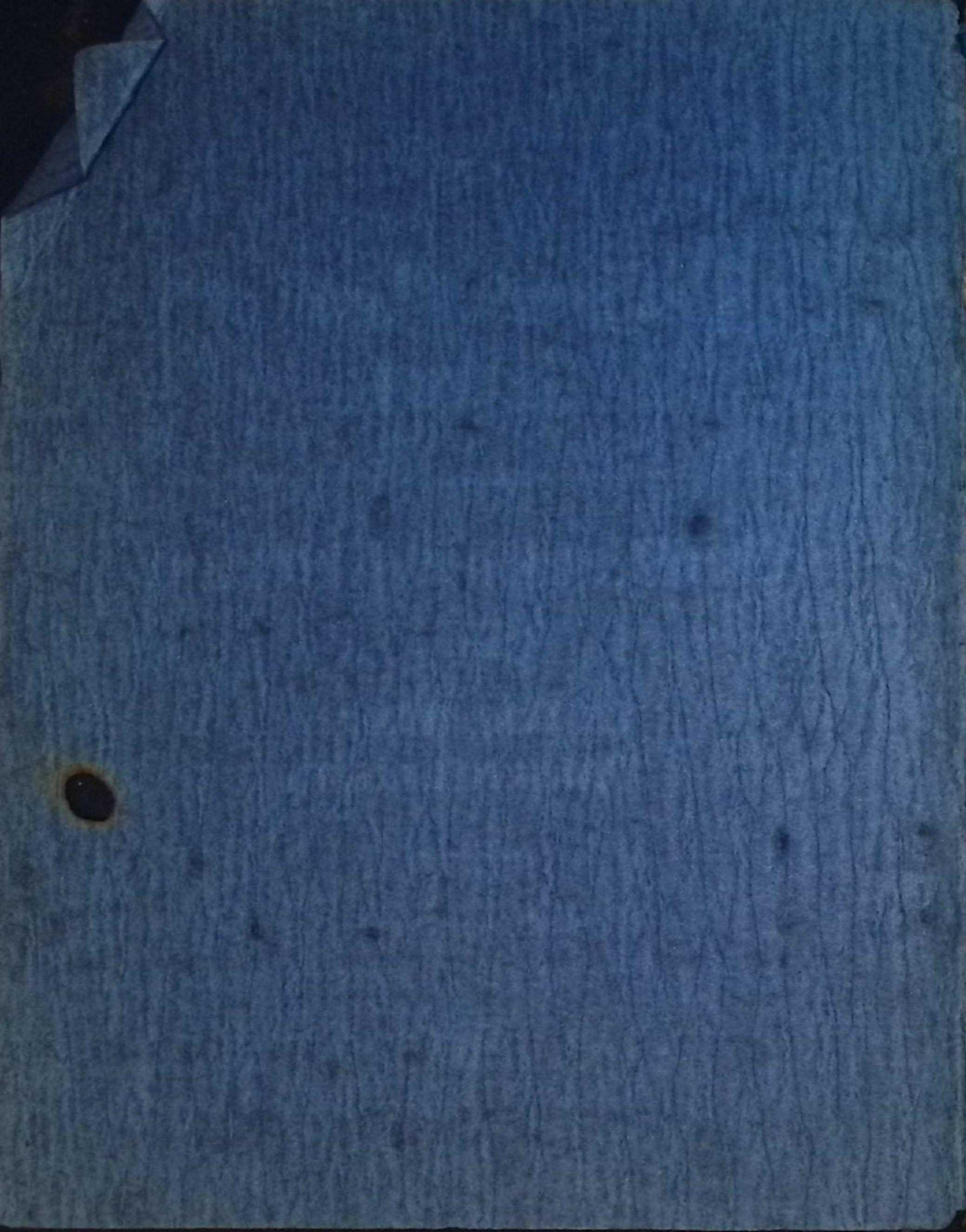
### The Inauguration of Professor Stevenson

May :: 1898

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# McCormick Theological Seminary

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The Celebration of the  
Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary  
of the Adoption of  
The Westminster Standards  
and the Inauguration of

Rev. J. Ross Stevenson, D. D.,  
as Professor of Ecclesiastical History



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PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

## PREFATORY NOTE.

The two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Westminster Standards was celebrated by the Board of Directors of McCormick Theological Seminary in co-operation with the Presbytery of Chicago. This celebration began on Sabbath, May first, under the auspices of the Presbytery, with sermons in the churches, appropriate to the occasion. It was continued under the auspices of the Board of Directors on Wednesday, May fourth, and on Thursday, May fifth, in the Church of the Covenant, when the addresses which fill the following pages were delivered in the presence of large audiences.

The address of Dr. Stevenson was his inaugural address as Professor of Ecclesiastical History, to which chair he had been elected by the Board of Directors at its previous annual meeting, and which election had been confirmed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., next succeeding. His address was happily adapted to the anniversary occasion. Preceded by the charge of Dr. Bryan, the Vice-President of the Board of Directors (in the absence of the President, the Hon. D. McCulloch), and followed by the address of Dr. Moffat, it was delivered on Wednesday evening. The address of Dr. Purves was given on Thursday afternoon after a banquet, tendered by the Board of Directors to the Presbytery of Chicago, the Faculty, the Trustees and the Alumni of the Seminary.

The Board of Directors has put these addresses into this permanent form as constituting a valuable contribution to the literature of the subject and an evidence of the profound influence which the Westminster Standards have exercised upon the life and faith of the Church.



The evening appointed for the inauguration of the Rev. Prof. Stevenson, D. D., having come, and the Board of Directors being assembled in the Church of the Covenant, in the presence of a large congregation, Prof. Stevenson presented himself before the pulpit and signified his willingness to subscribe the engagement prescribed by the Constitution of the Seminary, and thereupon did subscribe it in the book kept for that purpose. The engagement is as follows :

In the presence of God and of the Board of Directors of this Seminary, I do solemnly profess my belief that the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church contains a summary and true exhibition of the system of doctrine, order and worship taught in the Holy Scriptures, the only supreme and infallible rule of faith, and my approbation of the Presbyterian form of Church Government, as being agreeable to the Scriptures; and do promise that I will not teach, directly or indirectly, anything contrary to, or inconsistent with, the said Confession and Catechisms, or the fundamental principles of Presbyterian Church Government, and that I will faithfully execute the office of a Professor in the McCormick Theological Seminary.

Whereupon Dr. Bryan, on behalf of the Board of Directors, delivered the charge, as follows :

# The Charge to Professor Stevenson

by

The Rev. W. S. Plumer Bryan, D. D.,

The Acting President of the Board.



## THE CHARGE TO PROFESSOR STEVENSON.

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Dear Brother:

It is with singular satisfaction that the Board of Directors engages this evening in your formal inauguration as professor of Ecclesiastical History in our Seminary. You and we are no strangers to each other. It is twelve years now since we began to know you, first as a student for the ministry within the walls of this institution; and then as a fellow-director, sitting in our Board and counselling for the advancement of the interests committed to our care; then, as an adjunct professor, discharging each session more and more of the duties of the chair, until last year you were called to this professorship. It is not often that a Board of Directors has such thorough acquaintance with its professors-elect as this Board enjoys with you, as a Christian man, as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as a careful and exact student, and as a competent and successful teacher. With such ample knowledge as this, we have great confidence in the future as we now proceed to lay upon you fully the responsibilities of your chair.

That these responsibilities are serious you are doubtless well aware. In all the range of Christian thought, no questions carry more momentous consequences than those which fall naturally to you as a student and a teacher of the history of the Church. Our religion is in its character essentially historical. It finds its centre in One who died

for our sins according to the Scriptures, who was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, and, after that, of five hundred brethren at once. And each of these events—the death, the burial, the resurrection, and the manifestation of our Lord to his disciples—forms a link in that chain which binds our souls to God in living faith. And when, after the resurrection and the ascension, the Christian Church was called into being with the wonders of Pentecost, it took its form and shape under those historic events which marked the work of John and Peter and James and Paul and the rest of the apostles, and passed thence into that long stage of development which we call, distinctively, Ecclesiastical History. The revelation of God's love to fallen men and of his redemption is made known to us through historic persons, by historic events, and in historic periods. It cannot be understood by abstract reasonings concerning the nature of God and man, but only by a calm and open-minded study of those great facts in which it is embedded and from which it cannot be dis severed. We may, of course, find fault with this method of revelation, and wonder why the eternal God should subject His eternal truth to historic conditions and to the limitations of human proofs and evidences; but, whatever our objections may be, this is God's chosen method, and if we would lay hold of the truth we must look for it under the forms and amid the surroundings in which He places



it. We must save these precious facts, not only from historic iconoclasm, but also from the pious imagination which would enwrap them with legends, even as the gray moss of the south enwraps and deadens the sturdy oak. And having thus saved these facts we must set them in order that their real significance may become apparent. In any system of Christian Theology, therefore, the studies which centre in your chair are of primary importance in that they are the conditions which alone make possible the correct interpretation of God's revelation to man.

At the present time the questions with which you have to deal are, many of them, open; not in the sense that they are altogether new, but that, once settled, they have been forced open again by new conditions. There is no room for monotony, either in your own investigations or in the forms of your teachings to the young men committed to your care. In the new questions which you are called upon to face, you will find a stimulus to the best use of what you have already acquired as well as to those further researches which it will be your purpose to undertake.

We are told, for instance, to-day, that our faith is independent of the historic facts of Christianity and that we ought to look with unconcern upon those tendencies which reduce these facts to legends and these persons to mere ghostly resemblances of the living figures of the sacred page. In place of the historic verities of the faith, we are bidden to follow the inner light, the witness of the Spirit,

which we are told is equally clear, whether our facts be facts or not. It is gravely asserted that one's theological beliefs are not dependent upon historical conclusions, the former being a matter of faith and of the spirit; the latter, a matter of evidence and scientific proof.

There are doubtless those who have abandoned the historical basis of Christianity, and yet sincerely maintain its system of doctrine. Their assertions upon this point are so strong as to leave no room for doubt. It is, however, only a question of time with them. Doctrinal convictions, to be of force, must have for their foundation a solid basis of fact, and if the facts have disappeared, the conviction must sooner or later be sensibly effected. Even as, in years gone by, we repudiated scholastic axiom that what is true in religion may be false in philosophy, so, to-day, we must recognize that what is false in history cannot be true in doctrine, and, accordingly, the doctrine must shape itself upon the history. Our principal concern, however, is for those whose doctrinal beliefs are yet to be formed, and who are denied the solid historic foundation on which their teachers builded. No rational man will build his religious beliefs on a basis of myths and visions, and if the coming generation is to be taught that the persons and events in Scripture are unhistorical, their religious convictions will be no stronger than if they rested upon the tale of William Tell or the experience of Robinson Crusoe. It is, therefore, not a question of mere scientific interest, but of vital concern to the Christian faith,



whether the facts alleged in the Scriptures are real. The vindication of these facts and of these characters falls within the general range of the department of Bible history.

Your investigations, therefore, while they are to be free and open-minded, are yet to have a definite purpose. The purpose shines through the work of every scholar whose investigations are of value, and in none more than in those who boast of absolute freedom from bias. With the naturalistic bias as pronounced as it is to-day in many brilliant students of Church History, it is only reasonable that scholars of the Christian Church should cherish as their purpose, the vindication of the supernatural elements in its history. For such a purpose as this you have Apostolic authority in the person of John, the beloved disciple, who wrote his gospel with its account of the signs which Jesus did in the presence of His disciples, "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

If you have entered upon your work in the spirit of the beloved disciple, you have already discovered how closely related it is to the distinctive doctrines of the Gospel. Apparently, the world grows never weary of branding these doctrines as abstract dogmas evolved by the reason of man, and of no more worth than mere human speculations. Without undertaking to mark the boundary line between your chair and that of theology, it is enough to remind you that the only basis on which the Church receives

its doctrines, is that these are rooted and grounded in those great historical facts which cannot be denied by anyone possessed of the historical sense, and which demand explanation from everyone to whom logical consistency is an intellectual necessity. You will lay the modern Church under profound obligations to you, if you will vindicate again, for our generation, this historic basis of our faith, and thus make plain the way for our theologians who, coming after you, are charged with the task of reducing to unity those great truths which make up the body of our religion.

The Board of Directors will watch with profound interest your future course, both as a scholar and as a teacher. As a teacher, they commend to your sympathy and confidence the young men who are preparing for the ministry and who must face these problems with which you are now so familiar. They invoke on behalf of these young men, your patient and assiduous attention. As a scholar, the Board hopes that the results of your investigations will contribute to the advancement of the cause of historical Christianity through the settlement of some of the pressing questions of the day. The Board invokes for you the guidance and presence of Him who is the Spirit of Truth, and as the eye of your mind glances backward and forward from century to century of the history of the Church, may the eye of your faith be firmly fixed upon the Rock of Ages; upon Him who is the same yesterday, to-day and forever.



The Westminster Standards as Tested  
by History

by

The Rev. J. Ross Stevenson, D. D.,

Professor of Ecclesiastical History.

## THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS AS TESTED BY HISTORY.

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Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Board of Directors:

It is eminently fitting that an institution like our beloved Seminary should join with the Presbyterian Church at large in recognizing the worth and significance of that body of truth formulated two and a half centuries ago, and which we accept to-day as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. In honoring the anniversary of the Westminster Assembly it was thought best to have the Seminary unite with the Presbytery of Chicago, and in this joint celebration the committee has arranged that these inauguration exercises should constitute a part. It would be difficult for me to adequately express my appreciation of the high honor in being invited thus to engage with you in observing the fifth jubilee of the formation of our Standards. After subscribing anew to these precious documents and obligating myself not to teach anything contrary to or inconsistent with them, I esteem it a privilege on an occasion such as this to bear witness to their high value, and to join you in remembering with devout gratitude to God the men who bequeathed them to us as the supreme product of their labors.



I recognize the fact that I am to take part in these anniversary exercises because of the important chair to which you have called me and its vital relation to the Standards. Each department of instruction in the Seminary bears its own peculiar relation to the Confession of Faith and has a duty to perform in connection therewith, and that not merely in the negative way of teaching nothing contrary to it, but positively by vindicating its truthfulness. The exegetical department may be expected to show that the teachings of our Standards are based upon an exact and illuminative interpretation of the Word of God. It is for the department of Systematic Theology to show that in the Standards we have a comprehensive and self-consistent system of the contents of Revelation, and to elucidate and defend the system. In the department of Practical Theology, the homiletical uses of the Confession are to be considered, the duty of the Presbyterian minister to preach aright its truths as all sufficient, under the power of God, to save dying men.

And yet, as important as the relation of any of these departments, because so primary and fundamental, is the relation of the department of Historical Theology. The historic method must prepare for and enter into every other way of considering the Standards, and only by a mastery of their historical relations can they be fully understood and adequately appreciated. If these time-honored documents are to receive from us the recognition they deserve, we

must take into account the circumstances of their formation and the place they have subsequently had in the extension of Christ's kingdom. At a time when the value of our system of doctrine is being called in question, and often spoken against, in order to our more loyal adherence we need to enquire: Why and how were the Standards formed, and what have they done? In other words, to judge the creed of the Presbyterian Church aright, we must listen to the testimony of history.

To emphasize this thought, and also to illustrate in some measure the task of the chair to which I have been called, I propose to discuss as a theme most appropriate to this occasion

#### THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS AS TESTED BY HISTORY.

I. First of all, it is necessary to fix clearly in our minds the fact that there is in history a testing power which is both thorough and final. The history of the world, as we sometimes hear it stated, is the judgment of the world. Or, as Martineau has expressed it, "In the history of systems an inexorable logic rids them of their halfness and hesitations, and drives them straight to the inevitable goal." In its abstract and essential nature history has been defined as development. The great movements of the human race involve a gradual unfolding, a passing from one degree of energy and efficiency to another, an organic



growth, so that development—either in the form of improvement or of corruption and decline—is as characteristic of intellectual and moral progress, as it is of the expansion of the acorn into the oak forest. This signifies a rudimentary germ, a potential basis which expands in continuity of life towards a final terminus. To be sure, the history of fallen humanity, which must be determined by man's voluntary nature, under the quickening power of God, is entirely different from the history of matter, so far as substance and regulative laws are concerned, yet unfolding, gradual development, each according to its kind, is as characteristic of the one as of the other.

If this be true, whatever rightfully belongs to a historic process must be organically connected. "Human history," it has been said,\* "is a continuous line of connections. We can no more conceive a true break or perfect disconnection in it than in the current of a river. Though it naturally divides into periods and ages, distinguished from each other by epochal points, yet there is no separation at these points. The epoch itself, like a living joint in the human frame, is still a tie by which parts are articulated together and constitute one continuous organism." Each event has its connected antecedents, apart from which it cannot be understood, <sup>any</sup> ~~no~~ more than a portion of an organism can be understood, separated from those parts with which it is bound by the principle of interrelation.

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\*Dr. Shedd, *Theol. Essays*, p. 120.

Each event must have its appropriate consequents as well. Just as it is the resultant of the forces and factors which preceded it, so it in turn must be productive of that special fruit for which in the providence of God it was intended. Furthermore, it must conform to some general law of progress, to that unifying idea whereby the events in their almost endless succession are bound together and made parts of a vital organism.

According to this conception, anything which does not properly belong to a historic process will sooner or later be cast aside, or at least will never constitute an organic part of the unfolding germ. Just as when you attach some foreign substance to a growing tree, it may always remain with it, but in the very nature of the case cannot participate in the tree's life or be a real event in its history.

When we speak of something being tested by history, we may employ the term history, in an objective sense and mean the trial to which anything is put in the actual course of events, or we may use the term in a subjective sense and mean to apply our idea of history and discover if the matter in question satisfies what we conceive to be the conditions of a true historic process. There is nothing inconsistent in these two conceptions, as the latter includes the former, or at any rate should do so if based on accurate investigation. It is not our purpose to consider the Standards merely as tested by the processes of time, and give an account of their fortunes in the history of the Church since



their first adoption, but rather to apply the test of the essential idea of history, in order to discover whether the Westminster symbols fulfil all the conditions of an organic development. Such a test, if properly applied, requires us to take up the Standards, the circumstances of their formation, their backward and forward relations, and their consistency with a unifying idea or true philosophy of history.

2. At this point we venture the remark, that to test the Westminster Standards aright we must take the circumstances of their formation more fully into account than has ever yet been done. When we think of Church History as embracing the development of that religious community founded by Christ and His apostles, possessing the completed revelation of God's will and professing to be guided by it, there is laid out before us a vast field, which it would seem well-nigh impossible for any single department of human knowledge to adequately traverse. The external fortunes as well as the inner experiences of the kingdom of God on earth through centuries of progress furnish such a boundless and complicated series of events that the subject matter of Church History almost passeth knowledge. So that it is not surprising to have the attention called to neglected realms in the expansion of Christianity which the Church historian must not overlook. Now it is the earliest period of the Church's earthly career, and notwithstanding the laborious and fruitful investiga-

tions of such men as Zahn and Harnack, Lightfoot and Hatch, we are reminded that many ancient documents have not yet received their due attention, and that the obligation of the sacred historian with reference to them must not be overlooked. Or else it is the modern period of the history of the Church, and in this field Dr. Schaff\* felt that there was such special need of study and instruction that he suggested for seminaries the founding of a professorship of Modern Church History, with special reference to American Church History.

It has been stated† that "history consists of exceptional things, of celebrated or notorious events, of the lives and actions of great and exalted men, of conspicuous achievements in war and politics, in science and art, in religion and literature." Such a definition is, of course, narrow and superficial, since history is made up of what is little and common as well as what is great and strange. And yet, so far as our study of history goes, we are attracted by the exceptional and the strange and the important, and, since history is long and life is short, since by our very limitations we cannot expect to master the whole series of events which come within the realm of historic investigation, while counting no single event beneath his notice, the historian must seek to understand some things well, with

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\*The Life of Philip Schaff, p. 470.

†Definition of Dictionary of the French Academy. Quoted by Flint, *Philosophy of History*, p. 8.



full appreciation of their value and significance, just as the traveler notes with special interest the clear flowing streams, the deep shaded valleys and the lofty mountain peaks, no matter whether he takes into account the botany, geology and meteorology of the country or not.

Now, unquestionably, the Westminster Assembly looms up in the landscape of history like a prominent mountain. The formation of our Standards was an event of exceptional importance. As a well-known writer‡ on the subject has stated it, "The Westminster Assembly, if it does not form a landmark in the history of our common Protestantism, must at least be admitted to constitute an epoch, and a notable one, in the history of British Puritanism." Or, in the words of another historian\* of world-wide reputation: "It forms the most important chapter in the ecclesiastical history of England during the seventeenth century, whether we look at the extent or ability of its labors, or its influence upon future generations, it stands first among Protestant councils."

It is true some have regarded that group of men who prepared our Confession of Faith as a company of narrow-minded fanatics, whose pretensions were dangerous and whose endeavors resulted in failure and deserved ridicule. Even Milton, especially after they had condemned his treatise on "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," spoke

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‡Dr. A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly*, p. 1.

\*Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, v. I, p. 728.

of that body of men in vindictive scorn, and doubtless had them in mind when, speaking of the employment of fallen angels, he wrote:

“Others, apart, sat on a hill retired  
In thought more elevate, and reasoned high  
Of Providence, foreknowledge, will and fate;  
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,  
And found no end in wandering mazes lost.”

But, despite all prejudice and calumny, it must be admitted that a more earnest and better qualified body of divines has seldom ever met in Christendom, and what Hetherington undertook to prove more than fifty years ago may now be accepted as a just historic verdict, for in truth the Assembly was the “most important event in the century in which it occurred, and has exerted and in all probability will yet exert a far more wide and permanent influence upon both the civil and religious history of mankind than has generally been even imagined.” This at least is the opinion of the large body of Christians who have embraced the Reformed faith, as is evidenced by their loyal celebration of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the gift of the Westminster Standards to Christendom. One of our prominent religious journals,\* entirely out of sympathy with the doctrines of the Confession, makes this admission, which would probably receive general acceptance: “The

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\*The Outlook, Nov. 20, '97, p. 729.



Westminster Standards have occupied a large and noble place in the development of the religious history of the world. Their adoption was one of the most significant facts of the Puritan movement, which Carlyle has truly called one of the greatest in the history of the world."

We might naturally expect, then, that the formation of the Westminster Standards, so generally acknowledged as an event of signal importance, would receive at the hands of historians adequate study, and that the historical literature on the subject would be faithful and ample. And yet, as a matter of fact, the Assembly has been scantily noticed from a historical point of view.<sup>†</sup> This is not because material is not wanting as a basis for historical study. Fortunately, precious documents relating to the Assembly have been preserved for us, and from the study of these valuable sources one would suppose that long ere this such an account of the formation of our Standards had been written as to leave nothing further to be desired by the Presbyterian student of Church History. And yet, even the scholarly and popular book of Dr. A. F. Mitchell has scarcely gone further than the threshold of the subject. Hetherington's History, the base of supplies for innumerable popular addresses, is antiquated and unsatisfactory. Dr. Schaff, in his "Creeds of Christendom," has given an admirable resume of the Assembly's history, based on the

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<sup>†</sup>Dr. Briggs, in *Pres. Rev.*, 1880, p. 132.

sources, but his account is necessarily brief. Secular historians could hardly be expected to pay full tribute to the Assembly, but it seems surprising that standard Church Histories should ignore such an important event, or give it meagre mention. German historians, with their eagerness for investigation, their eagerness to enter all the by-ways of learning and follow the course of events through whatever remote and intricate channels, leave the Assembly almost entirely out of account. Dr. Schaff, with his own German training, has noted this and has drawn the conclusion that, if our Teutonic friends were "to be judged by their knowledge of English and American affairs they would lose much of the esteem in which they are justly held." Harnack, in his brilliant and comprehensive History of Dogma, excludes the whole history of Calvinism from his highly valued book, makes no mention of the Westminster Assembly, and only in a brief footnote refers to our Confession of Faith. And although more recently, in connection with Reformation history, the Assembly has received some attention, yet due notice has not been taken of an event so significant and wide-reaching in its influence. So that the conclusion of Hetherington holds good to-day, viz.: that this particular subject has never received adequate investigation, and, consequently, still remains in such obscurity as renders it exposed to every kind of misrepresentation.

It might be stated, in this connection, that candidates



for the ministry do not as a rule receive sufficient instruction regarding the historic setting of our Standards, and as a result there is not likely to be in the Presbyterian ministry that appreciation of our symbols which must be imparted and maintained by full historic information. Only when we come to know the Westminster divines, their learning, their piety, their earnestness; only when we take into account the elaborate discussions of the Assembly, the spirit of prayer that prevailed, the determination to base every conclusion on the Word of God; only with such an understanding of the Assembly are we prepared to give the Standards their due recognition, and to understand their place in the progress of the Kingdom.

But it will not do to contemplate the formation of the Westminster Standards merely as an isolated event, as if it derived no coloring from the age in which it occurred and had no connection with the preceding history of the Church. This suggests the third.

3. Third remark, that to test the Standards aright history must discover their genetic antecedents. We must take into account the civil and religious history which not only prepared the way for the composition of our Confession of Faith, but demanded, by the law of causal necessity, that such a creed statement should be formulated. The time would fail me to speak of the Puritan conflict, which started with two distinct tendencies in the Reformation, "one semi-Catholic, conservative and aristocratic; the other anti-Cath-

olic, radical, democratic," which raised the burning question whether the Church has any right to burden the consciences of her members (in matters of faith and worship) with aught that is contrary to or additional to the express or implied teaching of the Word of God; that conflict which came to a bloody issue under Charles I and Archbishop Laud, when the patience of a noble, freedom-loving people was exhausted, so that they rose in majestic indignation against the sacerdotalism, ceremonialism, intolerance and cruelty of the high Church and royal despotism which went hand in hand.

Were the Puritans in the right? And when victory was on their side were they justified in assembling in order to formulate their beliefs and establish their cause? Some would say, No. A recent English historian commends Laud, the oppressor of the Puritans, as the patron of learning, the tolerant sympathizer with religious difficulty, who by his life and death endeavored to bestow on the Church of England "the gift of theological liberty which she inherited at the Restoration."\* Even Mr. Gladstone has said of him, "Laud was the man who prevented the English Church from being bound in the fetters of an iron system of compulsory and Calvinistic belief."

But this is to take a one-sided view and ignore the position in which those were placed who aimed at a radical purification and reconstruction of Church and State, on

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\*H. O. Wakeman, *History of the Church of England*, p. 373.



the sole basis of the Word of God, without regard to the traditions of men. These God-fearing men had their rights, and when oppressed by a tyrannical king and bishop—in that spirit which declared “God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith and worship”—they asserted their independence with force of arms, and when the national Church was overthrown it was necessary for the now victorious Scotch and English Puritans to formulate their common doctrines and ideas of Church polity.

And coming thus together they did not, as is commonly supposed, import in a wholesome manner Continental views. The impression has prevailed to a large extent that Swiss or Dutch influence controlled the minds of the framers of our Confession, and that the immediate sources of our Standards are to be found in foreign theology. It is true that the Westminster divines fell heir to the results of doctrinal development in preceding times: they had in their possession not only the Apostolic, Nicene and Athanasian creeds, but all those valued symbols of which the Reformation was so productive, and which for fulness and doctrinal consistency were far in advance of the simpler confessional statements of the earlier Church. The idea of development in doctrine implies gain in the course of time, and it is natural to suppose that after sixteen centuries of theological discussion and expansion of the con-

tents of revelation there was a large dogmatic heritage, available to the Westminster Assembly, and which could be used in enunciating the principles of evangelical religion. Coming in the third generation of reformers, those Puritan divines were in a position to gather the ripened fruit of the Reformation, and it is certainly significant that with the Westminster Standards the creed-making period of the Reformed Churches closed. Possessing such models as the Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Helvetic Confession, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of the Synod of Dort, it would be natural to suppose that one or another of these would exert a weighty influence upon the deliberations and conclusions of the Westminster theologians.

But we must not overlook the fact that for more than half a century England had a strong force of independent native theologians, who through years of conflict in contending for the faith, had acquired such a keenness of perception, breadth of learning, and clearness of vision as to make them easily the peers of the Continental divines. Dr. Mitchell has rendered a most important service in collecting abundant evidence to show that in its general plan, as well as in the tenor and wording of its more important articles, the Assembly's Confession is derived immediately not from foreign, but from native sources, and that it embodies not conclusions adopted slavishly from any continental school, but the results of the matured thought and



study of the native British school. The main source, the exact prototype in certain particulars of our Confession is to be found in the articles of the Irish Church, believed to have been prepared by Archbishop Usher.

And so we find that the labors in Jerusalem Chamber did not break with the past, and were not the arbitrary or capricious sequences of preceding development. There were natural antecedents which not only prepared the way for, but in a sense demanded those Standards so prayerfully and laboriously framed between the years 1643 and 1648.

4. The next observation naturally follows, that to test the Standards aright, their influence since the time of their formation must be considered. Sufficient time has elapsed to enable us to do this calmly and advisedly. For a quarter of a millennium they have been in the hands of both friends and foes, those who have believed them implicitly and those who have attacked them venomously, and after all the passing years are we not now in a position to test results and determine how widely and to what effect Westminster teaching has entered the thought and life of individuals, communities and nations? If the soul of a system is revealed by its history, we ought to be able at this late date to form an impassioned yet appreciative and sincere judgment as to the significance and value of the Westminster Standards.

Their reception in England did not augur favorably for a widely extended acceptance. Parliament indorsed the

Westminster Confession as to its doctrinal articles, but refused to yield its own supremacy as a court of ultimate appeal in matters of discipline. This restriction, together with the growing strength of independency and the subsequent restoration of the monarchy, hindered Presbyterianism, so that in its main features it was never fully established in more than two counties—Middlesex and Lancashire. The Independents accepted the Calvinistic system of Westminster and, in 1658, the Savoy Declaration embraced the Confession of Faith, with slight modifications, regarding matters of Church government and discipline. No sooner was the Confession completed than it was taken up by the Scotch General Assembly, and, after careful examination, was solemnly adopted Aug. 27th, 1647.

Becoming the accepted Standards of the Puritans in England and Scotland, it is not surprising that one year after its completion the Confession of Faith was adopted "for substance of doctrine" by our New England fathers, at the Congregational Synod of Cambridge, and again in the same form at the Synod of Saybrook, Sept. 9th, 1708. We need not stop to speak of all the different Churches that have adopted the Westminster symbols. There are forty or more of these, embracing a ministry of nearly fifteen thousand, and a total membership of almost three millions. In addition, we have the Churches which accept our Standards as the basis of their Church doctrine, e. g. the Congregationalists, the Baptists, etc. The entire num-



ber of adherents of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches throughout the world has been estimated at twenty-five millions. Of these, some accept the doctrinal teaching of the Westminster Standards, but reject the polity; others, just the reverse. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Westminster Standards, in whole or in part, have been more widely adopted than any other confessional symbols, and number to-day as adherents more than any other Protestant creed.

Standards so long in use and so generally received have had full opportunity to reveal their influence. It is commonly acknowledged that their ruling ideas have been productive not only of a strong and vigorous system of theology, but of a warm vital religion and a healthful moral life. Beginning with the root principle of God's absolute sovereignty, distinguishing clearly between what is God's and the creature's, resting upon the sole authority of Scripture, the omnipotence of divine grace and the all-sufficiency of the redemptive work of Christ, the Calvinistic conception of our Standards, while it smites man with a sense of spiritual impotence, condemns him as a sinner, on the other hand exalts him as a redeemed soul in Christ, commands the universe for him and makes it impossible for him, as a new creature, ever to fail of eternal life.

It is not to be wondered at that wherever this system of truth has held sway it has had a regenerating, uplifting influence, and has made for righteousness. It has fostered

those virtues which have proved of greatest value to the home, to society, to the state, such as order, obedience, chastity, earnestness, economy, industry. Predestination signifies not only a destiny, but a life work and moral obligations, so that adherents to the Standards have earnestly striven to bring everything into subjection to the law of God, and in doing so promote His glory.

Systems of thought are to be tested by their fruits. One of the leading American teachers of philosophy\* has written: "Its effects on life are in a general way, and when historically interpreted, a legitimate test of the truth or falsity of a philosophical doctrine or system." And whether or not any creed statement embodies the precious truths of the Gospel, will be revealed in the course of history by the effects on life. Judged by its fruits alone, it may well be asserted that the Confession of Faith is the clearest, truest and most influential system of doctrine ever framed.

We often hear it stated nowadays that these Standards are not holding their own, that a reaction has set in against them, and that the time is hastening on when they will either be radically modified or completely discarded. It is worthy of note, in this connection, that through two centuries and a half of history churches holding the Standards have made no changes, so far as the system of doctrine is concerned, with the exception of one church that has modified Chap. III. of the Confession, so as to give it an Armenian coloring.

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\*J. Mark Baldwin, *Pres. and Ref. Review*, 1894, p. 40.



Other churches have prepared shorter creeds, and have adopted supplemental declarations, but the Standards remain to-day substantially as when they were first formulated, and as such are accepted by a larger ministry and a larger body of Christians than ever before. These profess to sincerely believe and adopt the Confession of Faith as containing the Scriptural substance of doctrine; thus accepting this symbol in its historic sense without any private interpretation. And to say that they do not believe the Standards would be to challenge their mental attitude or question their moral integrity. It is easy to suppose that since 1648 there has been great doctrinal development, but, as a matter of fact, there has been none which the Church at large has seen fit, as yet, to incorporate in the Confession. The denominations which are thought to have made such great advances in the realm of theology will be found in many instances to have gone backward instead of forward, and to be emphasizing something known to the Westminster divines, but rejected by them as not in line with the true development of doctrine and not belonging to the Biblical system. Much of the popular theology that lays claim to superiority over that of the past will be found, on careful examination, to be not an outgrowth of Westminster teaching, but a flat contradiction of it; so that if one be true, the other is radically and entirely wrong.

If the idea of doctrinal development is to be held at all,

we must either cast aside Protestant confessions as not being organically connected with the past history of the Church, and in accord with the true line of progress, or accepting the Standards as the body of truth wrought out through centuries of scholarly and prayerful study, and elaborated into organic unity by the Westminster theologians, we must contend that whatever changes shall be made, they must be in the form of amplification or application of the truths of the Confession, so that progress of thought will not break with the past, but come from it as legitimate issue.

5. To test the Standards aright, history must apply a true unifying idea.

That there must be a plan of some sort in the succession of human events, is not only the pre-supposition of revealed religion, but the induction from any series of historic facts. This accords with the idea of development already alluded to. "Through the ages one increasing purpose runs."

The seemingly isolated and fragmentary events are parts of one connected and orderly series, so that even what seem to us the abrupt turning points of history are found to be dependent on preceding conditions. As we follow the march of men and nations through the long historic evolution of time, we find that ends are being wrought out which have upon them the evident marks of design. Only when we look upon the whole fabric that is being woven by the flying shuttle of time, and discern the plan that is being



inwrought, can we understand the real value and dignity of history. To discern this plan, and the means of its accomplishment, is the object of what is known as the philosophy of history.

Dr. Henry B. Smith, years ago, with profound philosophic insight, showed that a true science of history must conform to four requisitions: (1) The scheme must be the legitimate reading of the whole of history. (2) It must assign an adequate law of progress. (3) It must assign an adequate end or object. (4) It must assign an adequate author.

Following out the method of Jonathan Edwards in his *History of Redemption*, Dr. Smith concluded that on philosophic grounds we are forced to seek the solution of the historic problem in the kingdom of redemption. This, then, is the unifying idea, which in one unfolding plan binds together all the races and empires that have peopled the earth, reaching already through six thousand years of history, centering in one kingdom which began at the beginning, is ever victorious, and will one day reach its final consummation. According to this conception, history is the work of God in time. He has conceived the plan: His providence is the method by which events are being brought into an orderly series; the agents and instruments he employs are human, and his glory is the last chief end. Such a conception is both Scriptural and historical, and hence profoundly philosophical, since history is but philosophy teaching by example.

Was this divine, eternal, overmastering plan, finding complete realization through the kingdom of redemption, recognized by the Westminster divines? No one can question their acquaintance with philosophy and the history of doctrine, and had they been inclined to base their beliefs on human speculation, they could have worked out some scheme or plan of history which would have been in accord with the prevailing philosophy of their time. And since human philosophies are constantly changing, their schemes would have tottered long since, or have required amendment or reconstruction. But they relied upon Scripture and its historic interpretation, and not upon metaphysics, to support their positions. "Let us not," said Dr. Reynolds, "put disputes and scholastic things into a confession of faith."

The Synod of Dort had adopted a preliminary rule, forbidding any member to argue from human philosophy or ecclesiastical authority; and in like manner the Assembly determined that the sacred truths enunciated should be decided on Biblical, and not dialectical grounds. They realized as well that the truths of the Word had been unfolding through a natural process of development, and, conversant with the history of the Church from the earliest times till the period in which they lived, they were familiar with the heresies and controversies which, in any previous age, had troubled the Church. Not that these are expressly named by them, but they are condemned by a clear and definite statement of the converse truth.



Our Westminster Fathers were animated then by the Biblical, by the historic spirit, and hence we would expect them to make much out of the plan of God in the world, and see in human history a divine theodicy, a real body of divinity, which is from, for and to God, which views the race in its primal and fundamental relations to the first and second Adam and converges on the idea of a redemption prepared, purchased and applied, running through the whole of human history and consummated in the full enjoyment of God throughout eternity.

That the Calvinistic movement has had such supremacy in modern history is generally acknowledged to be by reason of its theological system, a "comprehensive embodiment of nearly all the precious truths of the Gospel"; its organizing power, which has made it influential in the state as well as the Church, and its aggressive and reforming influence, applying, as it does, the fundamental teachings of the Gospel to human life in all its relations, endeavoring thereby to regenerate and purify society, to establish the kingdom of grace on earth and hasten the coming of the kingdom of glory. Our Standards, then, agree with the true unifying idea of history. And in the carrying out of the work of redemption among the sons of men, in advancing the history of the Church of Christ, not only in England, Scotland and Ireland, but in this land, and throughout the countries of the world, they have had an unparalleled influence and have made incalculable contributions to the goal

of history, "to the grand consummation where the natural interests of man in their integrity and their full development are made subservient to spiritual interests and to the revelation of the highest spiritual glory."

The significance of our Standards in the realization of Christ's redemptive work should inspire us with the consciousness of a historic mission, and lead us to prize more highly the heritage which has come down to us through a rich, historic past, and under the blessing of God should equip us thoroughly for the extension of that kingdom which has the high augury of final supremacy.

Such a study of the Standards reveals how admirably they bear the test of history, convinces us of their inherent truthfulness and leads to a higher appreciation of their worth as a doctrinal system. In consenting freely not to teach anything contrary to or inconsistent with these symbols of the Church, I feel not only bound by a solemn obligation, but constrained by an eminent privilege to uphold these articles of faith and vindicate their essential as well as their historic value.

At the same time, in the light of the study of the Westminster Standards, in which we have just engaged, we learn something of the value of Church history, both as a theological discipline and as a method of presenting the Gospel. It goes almost without saying that the candidate for the ministry will find the study of the progressive development of the kingdom of God on earth not only intensely interesting,



but highly profitable. More than this, the method and acquirements of such study will be of prime service to the minister of the Word, since it has always been the aim of the Church to be Scriptural, and history is not only the work of God in time—the unfolding of the eternal purposes of redeeming love—but the Gospel itself as it has been revealed in actual life.

So it is with full appreciation of the importance and high dignity of the department of History that I take up the work to which you have summoned me. Coming back to the institution where I received my theological preparation for the ministry, I esteem it a delightful privilege to be associated with the honored instructors at whose feet I sat as a student a few years ago, and also with the younger men who have since been added to the teaching staff, and in whose fellowship I have already found ever increasing joy. When I was a seminary student, the chair to which you have invited me was occupied by our present Systematic Theologian, Dr. Craig, who awakened such a warm, vital interest in Church history, and imparted such a strong stimulus to its study, and has ever since aided me by such friendly encouragement and sound counsel, that I regard him a most influential factor in preparing me for the work of instruction in a department which he, himself, did so much to magnify. Furthermore, I consider myself fortunate in having had the wise and intelligent assistance of my immediate predecessor, Dr. Zenos, now occupying the chair of

Biblical Theology, whose distinguished service in the realm of Church History has been an inspiration to me, and by his highly valued suggestions and friendly helpfulness the work of teaching has been rendered easier and more effective.

While I deem it a high honor to take up the work which these two able theologians have in turn laid down to engage in that of other departments, I fully realize the great difficulties of a seminary professorship, especially after four years of laborious, though delightful service. When I think of the importance of this chair—second to no other in the seminary—and of its high and varied requirements, I would certainly shrink from undertaking the work of instructing young men for the Gospel ministry, were it not for the clear consciousness that the great Head of the Church has called me to this sphere of service, and consequently will impart the wisdom and strength needed. In this confidence I begin, and hope to continuously discharge the duties of the Chair of Ecclesiastical History.



**Some Neglected Aspects of the  
Westminster Standards**

by

**The Rev. J. D. Moffat, D. D., LL. D.,**

**President of Washington and Jefferson College.**

## SOME NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to take part in the exercises of this evening. I am personally interested in Professor Stevenson, having had something to do with his preparation to become a student in this Seminary, and, therefore, having had some more remote connection with his preparation for this professorship, to which he has just been inducted. I have also a Christian's interest in this Seminary, and rejoice to know how many young men she is annually sending into all parts of the world, so well qualified to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I have also a Presbyterian interest in the celebration of the Westminster Standards, which very appropriately you combine with this inauguration service.

The theme I have chosen may not be especially attractive. It does not lead me to lavish laudation upon the Westminster Assembly—as they may do who discuss the historical or biographical aspects of the occasion. Nor am I to point out the special excellencies of our system of doctrine, or of our polity, as others may do. But I hope it may not seem inappropriate or out of harmony with the general spirit of praise and congratulation, which may very naturally be indulged, if I raise the somewhat serious question, whether the present attitude of our church toward the doctrines of our Standards is exactly that of former years?



In the treatment of such a topic one cannot make as exact statements as one can wish. Statistics are not only wanting, but in large measure inapplicable. Each one must determine for himself, as best he may, how closely my statements represent the facts and tendencies with which we must deal.

At any time beyond fifty years ago the question, what are the doctrines distinctively characteristic of the Presbyterian Church? would have been answered by a list that would certainly include the following: Universal Predestination, with its correlative complete foreknowledge of all future events; Individual Election, with its correlatives, Individual Reprobation and Limited Atonement; Total Depravity of all human beings; and a certainty about elect infants that powerfully suggested the probability of a non-elect class who might be lost. And the most palpable proof of the correctness of the answer could have been secured by any one who should attend for a few Sabbaths the Presbyterian Church nearest at hand.

But now, if we except the sermons called forth in celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the completion of the work of the Westminster Assembly, how long must one attend two services every Sabbath, and in how many different churches, before he could hear these doctrines formally discussed?

I think I may assume that these topics are, to state the fact moderately, less frequently presented in our pulpits

for the last fifty years than they were during the first two hundred years. I think I may assume that when they are presented in our pulpits on rare occasions, they are not so treated as to emphasize the specific forms and aspects which former generations of church goers were made familiar with. Thus, when atonement is expounded, as it still is, and I hope will forever be, its being a limited atonement is not suggested; when Election is defended, reference to Reprobation is apt to be carefully avoided; and when Total Depravity is considered, its totalness is not so described as to cast aspersion on the ethical value of truthfulness, honesty or benevolence, as sometimes exhibited by unregenerated men.

Assuming that such a change as this has truly taken place, there are two inquiries which become of special interest to us at this time.

The first is, Does this change properly indicate any real drifting on the part of the present generation of Presbyterians away from the essence of the system of doctrine taught in our Westminster Standards?

This question answered, we may still have to meet the inquiry, How are we to account for this changed attitude without allowing that there has been such a drifting as has often been charged upon us?

It is in view of this changed attitude of the pulpit and the pew toward distinctive Calvinistic doctrines that some outside saints proclaim the death of Calvinism. The proc-



lamentation annoys us somewhat, and we are tempted to retort, either in a humorous vein, saying something to our fellow saints in other churches about the liveliness of the corpse, and warning them not to arrange yet the details for the funeral; or in a more serious and practical vein, dwelling upon our growth in recent years, our liberality, our influence in the world, as indicating as great a vitality as the church has exhibited in any past age of its history. But may it not be conducive to a proper humility on our part quietly to recognize our full share of responsibility for the mistaken notion many people have, and may it not be wise to enter upon a candid examination of the facts involved?

As to the first inquiry, we may admit a change in our modes of expressing these characteristic doctrines, which I have named, and yet deny that we have given up any essential element of any one of them. My meaning and the correctness of this statement may be exhibited by a few illustrations of changes which have occurred.

1. It has been maintained, perhaps with sufficient proof, that some of the Westminster divines, and others who have subsequently accepted their Standards, have been intentionally hazy in their references to non-elect infants dying in infancy. We, of the present generation, have been reluctant to admit the fact, but citations from their writings have compelled us at least to withdraw a challenge, sometime kept before the theological world, for proof that a single Calvinistic theologian had ever held the belief that some infants

dying in infancy are not saved. In the absence of what they could regard as sufficient Scriptural ground for believing that all infants dying in infancy are elect infants, they did not venture to assert as their own opinion that they were all elect, and, in some cases, felt compelled to say they considered it probable that non-elect infants might die in infancy, and if so, the logical consistency of their system of doctrine shut out all hope of their eternal salvation. Before we indulge in any denunciation of these theologians of one and two centuries ago, we should at least remind ourselves that they had very properly determined to hold nothing concerning the eternal future to be true except they could find it revealed in the Word of God. We must credit them with being quite as willing as any Christian men in the world, of their own time or of any age, to find infant salvation taught in the Bible. But unable to find what they could regard as a plain teaching of the fact, and theologians of other communions being unable to point out to them any such direct teachings, it is not strange that the mass of them kept silent on the subject, and a few of them expressed their opinions so boldly as to create the impression that they contemplated lost infants in the other world as a fact, or a strong probability. At the same time, I must express my present opinion, possibly due to my insufficient scholarship, that the older Calvinistic theologians have not positively asserted infant damnation, have not plainly declared their belief that non-elect persons have actually died in their



infancy, but have simply supposed such cases possible, and proceeded to defend the justice of God against those who would require him to save all such persons, to whom no offer of salvation could be made; or they have been non-committal on the problem.

But the fact that the Westminster Confession, alone of all great creeds, described a mode for the salvation of infants dying in infancy, without the necessity of baptism and faith—a mode consistent with the attributes of God and the inherited depravity of the child, prepared the way, as no other creed has done, for the elimination of doubt on this subject from Christian consciousness. At the present time it can be asserted that the belief in our church is universal that all infants dying in infancy are elect-infants, and therefore saved in the way God's grace has provided. This present attitude may be extra-confessional, it cannot be shown to be contra-confessional. Our position may be in advance of that held by the Westminster divines, but it is surely the position they would gladly have occupied if they could have found ground for it in the Scriptures.

We have found ground they did not find, partly by shifting the burden of proof, and maintaining that we have no right to believe those are lost whom the Scriptures do not declare to be lost, that the provisions of God's grace are such that all men are saved, except those who in some way indicate to God an unwillingness to be saved from sin in his way; and partly by our conception of God's character, as

we find it revealed in the gospel, as one to whom salvation is a more congenial work than condemnation.

2. The same principle of non-essential change finds illustration in our modern attitude towards the doctrines which cluster about the Divine Sovereignty, such as Predestination, Election, Reprobation and the limiting of the efficacy of the Atonement to the Elect.

There can be no doubt, I think, that in former years the Divine Sovereignty was usually so presented and defended as to suggest certain erroneous conceptions of the truth—especially to those who had not been carefully indoctrinated, and who might come to the study of the problem with some prejudice. Thus, God's independence of his creatures in his decrees and their outworking was so magnified as to create the impression in many minds that God was indifferent to the effects his decrees might work upon his creatures. Now, to represent independence so as to suggest indifference is simply to misrepresent it, and practically to inculcate error. Again, God's acting, according to the counsel of his own will, was often so dwelt upon as to create the impression that he was simply arbitrary in his government of the world, as if there were nothing back of his mere will to determine what his choices should be. Often, again, the fact that there is no being to whom God is accountable for his actions,—no higher being existing, and accountability to his own creatures being inconceivable—often this important truth has been so dwelt upon as to create the



impression that God's acts are of that irresponsible nature which we cannot but condemn in our fellow-men. The fact that there are regulative principles of wisdom and righteousness in the very nature of God, which determine the choices and purposes of his will, has been overlooked, and therefore, an erroneous conception of God has arisen in the ordinary mind. Now, without departing from the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, we have avoided these extreme modes of representing it. Probably it is only fair to say that, from many pulpit ministrations, it has been practically omitted, because of the difficulty of discussing the subject without giving rise to these erroneous ideas. And when the fact of God's supremacy is insisted on, there is not much attempted in the way of analysis and definition, but the purpose to be subserved by the doctrine is made prominent, namely, to exalt God before the mind of man, that God and man may be brought into proper relationship. Yet this end, I think, may better be effected by limiting the sovereignty to the person of God, connecting his decrees and works with the great and attractive impulses of his nature, wisdom, love, grace and righteousness, and avoiding carefully those phrases which emphasize unduly power and authority.

3. For another illustration we may consider the undoubted fact that such doctrines as Predestination, Election and Reprobation are seldom heard of from the pulpit. Reprobation has been repudiated as a term, because it is so apt

to create the impression that some positive power is exerted by God to keep some men in a sinful state, and the term Preterition takes its place. As this term is usually employed it has no positive content, and implies only the absence of divine election. If God does more for A than for B, he must do less for B than for A—there is election for A and preterition for B. While this may be a very much milder way of stating the case than preachers employed a century or two centuries ago, it is yet consistent with our Confession of Faith, and avoids the repugnant inference that a righteous God can put forth power or influence in perpetuating unrighteousness. We cannot persuade ourselves that God is unwilling, in any case, to help one of his creatures to live a righteous life, if he is truly desirous of so doing.

But, although Predestination and Election are not often discussed in Presbyterian churches, it would be a mistake to suppose that the faith of the Presbyterians has drifted away from them. The facts represented by these doctrines may be taken for granted by the preacher as accepted by the larger proportion of his congregation. Except when controversy has created misconceptions of these doctrines Christian people do not think of questioning that God governs the world according to preconceived plan, and has had something to do with determining the difference between the believer and the unbeliever. All Christian prayer and praises imply this implicit belief that God belongs to the initiative of every sinner's salvation, and this first step is taken by him without discovery of merit in the sinner.



Whatever change may have taken place in the mode of stating these doctrines lies in the direction of avoiding all appearance of fatalism in the one case, and all suspicion of partiality on God's part in the other case. In presenting the doctrine of Predestination we guard against a fatalistic conception of it by insisting that no such exercise of Divine power shall be thought of as rendering future events certain to occur, which would be really inconsistent with human freedom and responsibility. The thoroughgoing Calvinist of modern times will not allow himself to be surpassed by any, who keeps within the facts of human nature, in depicting the freedom of man in his choices and actions. Moreover, avoiding the terms Predestination and Foreordination as too likely to arouse the prejudices of controversial times, the modern Calvinist can teach the same truth by representing God's government of the world as a perfectly rational government; which, of course, is government according to a perfect plan, determined in all its stages by the high and holy end in view, so definite in the Divine mind that no smallest detail has been overlooked—a plan, therefore, never calling for change, or repair. It can easily be made to appear that the progress of the universe, as set forth by the scientific evolutionist, is exactly such progress as universal predestination calls for. Both in evolutionary science and in Calvinistic theology God is presented as realizing an end known and chosen from the beginning, and by means which must have been equally known and chosen

in advance. The chief difference is that science is primarily concerned in tracing the successive stages in their exact order and proximate causes, while theology fixes attention upon the ultimate cause of the entire progress and the final end to be realized; and while science gives only incidental place to God and his chief end, theology gives only incidental place to the exact order of events and their natural causes.

I confess it is not so easy to give as definite and full an account of the Election of some men to everlasting life, as the older theologians commonly gave, without giving countenance to the feeling that God is "partial" in his dealings with men to an extent we do not fully approve of in our fellow men. This difficulty arises from our emphasizing the fact that God's election of a man has no kind of relation to anything the man has done, or will do, or is. This leaves the matter a mystery without hope of solution. Why is one taken and the other left? is not only unanswerable, but the very question becomes absurd. There is no reason at all for it. Election thus becomes the one act of God, of which we may say it is without a reason. There is reason for the purpose to elect to be found in the love of God, which moves him to make sure of the salvation of a great multitude whom no man can number; but no reason for the elections which follow the purpose to elect. In all ages God has chosen men for special service, and we can plainly see they were fit for the service required, and so the selec-



tions have invariably been rational selections; and it troubles us to contemplate God's elections to eternal life and then be forced by our theology to question whether these also can be called rational elections. It can hardly be thought strange, therefore, if modern theologians have questioned the right to make a sweeping denial of any ground whatever for God's elections. What Paul had in view, and what the Reformation theologians wished to emphasize, was the fact that no meritorious ground for election can be found in any man; that while one's election furnishes him ground for thanksgiving to God, it furnishes none whatever for pride. So long as we avoid the error against which Paul and all evangelical theologians properly protest, we may certainly decline to join in the sweeping statement that God's elections have no reference whatever to the elect—even if we consider it impossible or imprudent to specify in any case what the ground may have been. I claim the right to maintain that all God's acts are rational—for sufficient reasons—even if I cannot specify what the reasons are.

May I be so far personal as to say wherein my own mind has found relief in the presence of this problem? It is in the thought that two sets of terms may be regarded as equivalent, namely, Elect and Non-Elect, and Willing and Unwilling. Each of these correlatives divides the adult world into two classes. Can any one doubt that the classes are the same? Are not all the elect willing to be saved from sin in God's way? Are not all the non-elect unwilling to be

saved from sin or unwilling to be saved in God's way? Can any one doubt that the line which divides the adult world into Elect and Non-Elect corresponds exactly with the line that divides the same world into the Willing and Unwilling to be saved in God's way?

Now, can we not stop right at this point? The attempt to trace all the relations between Election and Willingness, and Preterition and Unwillingness, will just result in a headache. The Christian man can not possibly distinguish sharply between the divine and the human in that complex of influence, circumstance, instruction, example, training, investigation and meditation, which preceded his conscious acceptance of Christ as his Savior. The effort to see our way clearly through this labyrinth, and mainly for the gratification of an intellectual curiosity, is too much for our limited powers. It is really an attempt to see the conduct of the world from the standpoint of the Creator, which the creature has no right to think he can do. It is one example of the effort to distinguish between the rational and the supernatural, which overlooks the fact that the natural has really no independent existence; if we trace the natural far enough back, it runs into the supernatural. If we can only bring men to the point where they will work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and recognize the fact that it is God who is working in them, both to will and to do of his good pleasure, they will be essentially Calvinists, and we need not bother them by striving to have them think clearly upon the philosophy of such a life.



Assuming now that there has been no serious change in Presbyterian belief, it remains for us to meet the question, How are we to account for the fact that these characteristic doctrines are not formally discussed in our pulpits as in earlier years?

In the first place there has been a very general giving up of doctrinal preaching. Whatever may be the cause of it, and however we may regret it, there can be no doubt about the fact; and it partly accounts for neglect of Calvinistic doctrines on the part of Presbyterian ministers.

In the second place it is equally clear that there has been an abandonment of controversial preaching on the part of all leading Protestant churches. How much of this there used to be only our oldest ministers can remember. It was then thought that loyalty to our system of doctrine required that direct efforts should be made to convince members of the other churches that they were wrong and we only right. But replies were just as vigorous and apparently as effective. This method of bringing about church unity by trying to convert all to one creed was a failure. It not only tended to perpetuate denominations, but to widen the breach and intensify the hostility. Modern history has confirmed us in the conviction that Christian unity will make more rapid and satisfactory progress when controversial preaching is abandoned. It is a mistake, though a natural one, to suppose that direct efforts are always most effective. The churches that in former years were wide apart in their

doctrinal belief have certainly grown together; and there is to-day more genuine evangelical sympathy between the Methodist and Presbyterian churches than ever before. If we will avoid the old war terms, which excite suspicion and prejudice, our Presbyterian preaching that is faithful to Calvinistic doctrine will command hearty approval in congregations that would once have heard it in contempt. The philosophy of this fact, that we grow together when we make less effort to do so, is easily seen. Truth is one and truth has affinity for truth. If such a body of truth as the evangelical system constitutes be once lodged in a human heart, it will readily assimilate other truth. Truth has only to be clearly presented, to be fairly apprehended, to be incorporated with what is already held. If we can get people soundly converted and set them to reading the Bible, we need not feel much concern about their Calvinism. Theology is but the philosophy of religion, and the true religion will be followed in due time by the true philosophy of it, if we do not try too hard to hasten the process.

But a third consideration should not be overlooked. In connection with other churches ours has been awakened to a sense of the world's great need of simple, gospel truth. There is some sort of connection, not exactly contemporaneous, between the rise of the missionary spirit a century ago and the decay of the denominational preaching. There are such masses of people, even in our own country, and particularly in our cities, who are ignorant of the elements



of the gospel, that we have all felt the pressing importance of the most perfect unity among all Christian people in the effort to get these multitudes enlightened sufficiently to make them followers of Christ. To use Sabbath opportunities in the discussion of the higher themes of theology, however true and important we may esteem them, must seem peculiarly inappropriate to any one who realizes how few there are to appreciate such discussions, and how many there are who need bread that they can readily assimilate.

The preacher, indeed, should be familiar with these higher themes, for he needs them to give steadiness and stimulus in his work. And he should be so familiar with the essence of these doctrines that he can make limited use of them without slavish adherence to old terms and phrases; and if he has tested them in his own religious experience he may find opportunities for wise use of them occasionally in his preaching and pastoral work.

While, therefore, I cannot regret the decay of preaching of a sectarian character, I do think our preachers neglect too much the doctrinal preaching, which is needed to familiarize the public mind with the fundamental facts and truths which constitute the evangelical system. If this work were better done than it is, we might be quite hopeful that momentum would carry the great majority of thoughtful Christians onward to essential agreement with our Westminster Standards in their more advanced positions.

The Value of the Westminster Standards  
to the Preacher

by

The Rev. Prof. George T. Purves, D. D., LL. D.,

Professor of R. T. Literature and Exegesis,  
Princeton Theological Seminary.



## THE VALUE OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS TO THE PREACHER.

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The Protestant Reformation was marked by the revival of the art and power of preaching. The church of the Middle Ages had witnessed a steady decline in this department of church service, and in the period immediately preceding the Reformation preaching had degenerated into the mere recital of monkish legends and superstitious tales, if not into actual buffoonery. Of course, even in the Dark Ages, there were notable exceptions. We remember Anselm of Canterbury, in the eleventh century, who, with much abstract discussion, yet sought to expound the Scriptures to his monks. We remember Bernard of Clairvaux, in the twelfth century, who revived with his mighty eloquence and evangelical message the remembrance of Chrysostom. We remember Peter of Blois, called for his sermons the "Most Divine"; Thomas Aquinas; Berthold, the Franciscan, and Thomas á Kempis; nor do we forget that both the Dominicans and the Franciscans had not wholly abandoned the original purpose of their founders. The spiritual deadness of the church had also here and there awakened reactions of mystical fervor, which found expression in the proclamation of a real message for the spiritual life. But these were exceptions, and in Christendom as a whole, especially in the darkest hour before the dawn, the preaching

of the Gospel had nearly ceased and the voice of the church neither instructed the people nor moved them to Christian living.

But the Reformation re-established the best traditions of the older age, with its Athanasius, its Basils, its Gregories, its Chrysostom, and its Augustine. This was first because it was a popular movement. The fetters of sacerdotalism were broken. The individual found himself summoned to immediate intercourse with his Maker. The religious movement was an appeal to the common people, and was intimately associated with social aspirations and political hopes. It was impossible that so popular a movement should not unloose the tongue of the orator and preacher. In the second place the Reformation restored the old conception of the Gospel as an intelligent message from an intelligent Being to the hearts and minds of intelligent creatures. The church became once more a congregation of thinking believers who required instruction from God's Word, edification through Christian doctrine, impetus to Christian living. In short, Christianity became, what it had been at the beginning, a proclamation of truth and a persuasion of its reality. Wyclif, Huss and Savonarola first broke the silence. Then Luther moved Europe by his sermons, popular and vehement, no less than by his famous theses. Calvin governed Geneva from the pulpit of his cathedral. Zwingli led the Reformation in Zurich as the preacher of the city



as well as on the field of battle. Knox in Scotland, Cranmer and Latimer in England, shook the old fortress of error and led the way to the building of a new age. Thus preaching became what it was meant to be by Him who first sent the Apostles forth. The Bible was placed before the congregation. The priest was transformed into the preacher. The exposition and application of God's truth became the central feature of divine service; and the message from God to man became once more the guide of life and the potent factor in the progress of mankind.

Now, in the onward sweep of the Reformation no national movement was so thoroughly popular as the British Puritanism, out of which the Westminster Standards were born. The English Reformation, indeed, had two sides. On the one side it began with the King and worked from the top down; and in this aspect it was often anything but popular. But that was only half its story. On the other hand there was the movement from below upward. This originated with the Lollards before Luther. It was augmented by the influence of the translated Bible; while from Geneva and Germany the pure conception of religion swept into the English people until Puritanism swelled up and over the restrictions of the English church itself and put into effect its demand for a real Reformation. In such a movement the voice of the preacher could not be heard. There was never a time when the minds of men seethed so turbulently with the discussion of theology and politics, of civil and

ecclesiastical rights and duties. History says that "the age was conspicuously one of great preachers." "The pulpit of the metropolis displayed a galaxy of light and genius such as it had never before exhibited." It was out of this most popular movement of the Christian mind that the Westminster Standards were produced. Hence it would be a great mistake to think of them as the mere product of cold scholasticism, or as a creed framed without relation to life.

Their reference to the practical work of the preacher in a time of great popular excitement is very clear.

This appears first from the constitution of the Assembly itself. The great majority of its members were hard working pastors. The desire on the part of some eulogists to emphasize the intellectual ability of the Assembly has caused them to thrust into special prominence the few members who are famous in theological literature. We are reminded of Twisse, so eminent as a theologian; of Selden, "the glory of the British nation"; of John Lightfoot and Thomas Gataker, the learned Hebraists; of Joshua Hoyle, the friend of Ussher; of Anthony Tuckney, afterwards professor at Cambridge. But in fact the majority of the Assembly were not distinguished, save as "godly, learned and judicious divines," and as representing the Puritan pulpit of England. You will not find many of their names, save in the histories of Puritanism. They were selected two from each county, two from each university, and two from the



Channel Islands. The constitution of the Assembly, therefore, was not that of a select body of scholars, but of a representative convention. Its composition will be best understood from such names as the following: There was William Gouge, the father of the London Puritan ministers; Stephen Marshall, the favorite preacher before the Long Parliament; Edward Calmay, a preacher of Christian experience and a favorite with the wealthy merchants of the city; Herbert Palmer, who used his wealth and broke his health in devoted pastoral labors; Jeremy Burroughs and William Greenhill, who were called "the morning and evening stars of Stepney"; Joseph Caryl, favorite preacher to the lawyers at Lincoln's Inn; Thomas Goodwin, a successful expository preacher; Oliver Bowlis, author of the book "The Evangelical Pastor" and who, in his sermon before the Assembly, set forth the need of an earnest preaching ministry. These men give the type of the convention. It is true that it was a theological age; that every preacher was a theologian and the people were deeply interested in theological truth. It was an age of intense theological discussion, when even the soldiers of Cromwell's army discussed theology about their camp fires and were ready, if need be, to puncture a heresy, if not a heretic, with the point of a pike. But that the creed which this produced was removed from life is disproved by these very facts. It was not made by mere scholastics, but by men who were daily exercised in the ministry of the Word and who

meant by it to express the truth which in pulpit and home would move the mind of the nation and mould the generations yet to be.

The practical motive of the Assembly also appears in the kind of works which they produced. The first of the Standards completed was the Directory for Worship, a fact which is significant of the practical interests which dominated both Parliament and Assembly. In Chapter VI. of the Directory the preaching of the Word is discussed. Its importance is emphasized. That it should be Scriptural is strongly affirmed. The necessity of careful preparation is laid down. Simplicity in language so that it might be understood by the common people is urged, and the inordinate length of sermons is rebuked. Then the Catechisms were prepared for the purposes of pastoral instruction that the youth of the land might be furnished with a knowledge of religious truth and duty; while the length of the Confession itself was due to the fact that it was not meant to be a Creed used in worship, but a manual of instruction for the Christian man. Thus the prevailing motive which manifestly dominated the production of the Standards was to provide for young and old, for private and public instruction, an instrument which should deal with the lives of men and furnish them with right faith and all good works.

Let us keep this view of the Standards well in mind. It is often forgotten. They are thought of as a scholastic body of divinity, as the work of the theologians without interest



in life. But the very contrary is true. Whatever men may think of them now, it must be acknowledged that they are the products of men who were standing in the thick of life's battle and who, while educated theologians, intended by means of them to provide for the nourishment of the living church.

Before leaving this historical aspect of our subject let me also remind you that the churches trained under these Standards have in fact produced an eloquent, practical and evangelical ministry. The objection that the Westminster theology is not preachable may be fully met by the reply that it has been preached. We remind you in England of the names of John Bunyan who, though a Baptist, may be fairly claimed as a representative of Westminster theology; of John Howe, perhaps the greatest preacher of his day; of John Flavel, most spiritual of authors and preachers for the Christian life; of Augustus Toplady, the author of "Rock of Ages"; and, we may add, of George Whitfield, the evangelist of two continents. In Scotland we might speak of Alexander Henderson, "whose power as a preacher was only surpassed by his power as a leader"; of the saintly Rutherford, quaint, fervent, and learned; of the field of preachers after the Restoration, Welch, Cargile and Cameron; and after the Revival of the Haldanes, Chalmers, Guthrie and Arnot. Were we to recite likewise the great names of the American church we would easily be able to show that the Calvinistic preachers have done much to mould the life of the

republic, to educate the popular mind, and to build up the Church of Christ in these United States. The Westminster Standards was the platform on which the Pilgrims stood; it came with the Scotch and Irish to the Middle States and the Carolinas; and the men who proclaimed its doctrines moved with the tide of immigration toward the West and laid in great part the religious life of the newer parts of the Union. We are not concerned to contest the merits of other types of evangelical preaching nor to deny the great services which other forms of theological statement have rendered. We are only concerned to maintain the value of that preaching which has been based upon our Standards and to refute the declaration, sometimes made, that it is not fitted for practical purposes. It has entered too mightily into the formation of both the modern church and state, into education and missions, not to have proved its worth as a great instrument of popular enlightenment and progress.

So much for the historical aspect of our subject. We now turn to that for which this has been a preparation and raise the question, What is the value of these Standards to the work of the preacher to-day? That they have had value for the preacher of the past, will doubtless be admitted by all. But under the changed conditions in which we live to-day, may we claim that their value is undiminished? It is here that there is the greatest doubt and opposition. It will be doubtless acknowledged upon all



sides that the Standards are monuments of the faith and history of the Protestant Church. It will be admitted by us that they rightly represent the truth of the Gospel. But there are some who, having admitted this, would lay them aside as theological fossils, and maintain that in the new conditions of the age in which we live they have little practical help to give to Christian preachers.

In order that we may fairly discuss this subject, it is necessary for us first to make some discriminations. I would never for a moment maintain that the relation of the preacher to the Standards can be the same as that which he maintains to the Bible itself. I would strongly affirm that we are to preach the Word of God. Whatever the value of the Standards may be, the relations of the preacher to them and to the Bible are quite different. The Bible is his rule of faith and practice. It is from the Bible that he is to obtain his heavenly suggestions. The Bible is to be the subject of his proclamations and the means of his own communion with God. Let us carefully remember this and whatever we may say in eulogy of the Confession, let us not give ground for the supposition that we for one moment place it as a substitute for the Word of God.

Furthermore, we should remember that preaching necessarily changes in its form and requires new methods in successive periods. It would be utterly unwise for the preacher of the present to merely repeat the terminology of the past. He must preach to the age in which he is

living. He must have regard to her problems and conform himself to those methods of thought the force of which she will feel. We are not contending for a parrot-like repetition of past formulas. But what is the relation, for the preacher, of his Creed to the Bible? It would be folly to maintain that he does not need a Creed, but that he may be content with the Bible itself, for that always amounts in the end to saying that he can make his own Creed, as he certainly will do. This would result in boundless variation and theological anarchy. Supposing then that the church is to have a Creed, what is its relation for the preacher to the Bible? I answer, it is to be his guide, the unifying factor of his thought. It will act for him as an interpreter of Scripture. It will control his use of Scripture, and under its influence his declaration of Scripture will rightfully and inevitably be moulded. I am supposing the case of a man who honestly accepts his Creed, after due investigation, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scripture. Such a man will ever be ready to test his Creed by the Word of God; but, so long as he believes it to be Scriptural, it will necessarily give form to his method of Scriptural preaching.

With then this conception of the relation of the Standards to the Bible, permit me to point out what I conceive to be the great contributions which the former makes to the modern preacher and which alone are enough to justify, in my opinion, their maintenance in the pulpit and their use in the study.



The first point which I make is that the Standards create a type of preaching dominated with the conviction of the paramount importance for religious life of definite religious ideas. So every Creed will do in proportion as it is elaborate. And such most emphatically will be the influence of the Westminster Standards. They were born, as we have seen, in an age of definite religious opinion. They declare that truth is in order to goodness, and, therefore, that goodness is to be obtained through truth. The effect of them upon the preacher will inevitably be, as it always has been, to leave him to proclaim definite religious ideas; and, more than this, will so form his own mind that in proclaiming the Word of God he will do so in a definite, doctrinal way.

Now, this effect of the Standards on preaching may seem a very primary one on which to dwell, but, in fact, at the present age, nothing is more worthy of mention, for the fatal fault of much of modern preaching is just the indefiniteness of religious belief which characterizes it. This is the resultant of several influences. It is partly the result of a prevalent type of philosophy, which declares that Divine things cannot be known in themselves. It is partly the result of the distrust which criticism has created in all theological truth. It is absorbed from the agnosticism of science. It has intruded itself into the realm of theological discussion, and it has produced, even where its principles are not acknowledged, a spirit of doubt which leads the preacher to confine himself to pious generalities or to ethical

precepts. In consequence, much of our modern preaching is an inquiry rather than a proclamation, and leaves the minds of the hearers without the strong nutriment of definite religious conceptions.

Now, the criticism which, from the point of view of the preacher, must be passed upon all forms of this agnostic theology is this: that when he comes into contact with the spiritual needs of men, he finds an imperious demand made upon him for definiteness of religious instruction. The people inquire, What are we to believe concerning God, and how are we to think concerning Christ? What does God say of sin and of the future? What must I do to be saved? Before these imperious demands of the human mind, in its moments of most earnest inquiry, the agnostic preacher is compelled to be dumb, or to give a stone for bread and a scorpion for a fish. The effect on the other hand of a mind trained in the Standards of Westminster will be to send forth a class of preachers, not only able to cope with the unbelief which surrounds them, but to proclaim, in unmistakable accents, definite answers to the questions about which men, by their own confession, need to know.

In the second place, the effect of the Westminster Standards on the preacher will be to build his preaching, as no other Creed can do, upon the authority of God. He will speak to his fellow men out of the profound conviction that what he proclaims is not a human speculation, but a divine message.



If I mistake not, the central constructive idea of the Westminster Standards is their doctrine of God. Their formative idea is not the bare decree of God, but His nature and authority. The Shorter Catechism begins with its sublime definition of God, and the Confession presents, at greater length, the same truth as the controlling precept of its subsequent doctrine. Most complete and beautiful is its description of the Divine Being. It sets him forth as infinite and perfect, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to His most holy and gracious purposes, most loving, most gracious, most merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, yet withal most just and terrible, hating all sin and that will by no means clear the guilty. Then it sets him forth as self-sufficient, the fountain of all being, and exercising sovereign dominion. To Him nothing is contingent or uncertain, and to Him is due whatever service he is pleased to require from his creatures. Try to realize the completeness and the sublimity of this conception of God. It is simply the Biblical idea, but so arranged as to unite in one description all its elements. Even the doctrine of the Trinity is less elaborated in the Confession than this general conception of God. There is not a trace of the influence of philosophy upon it. It is simply the complete statement of what the Bible discloses concerning God, and, upon this, as the fundamental truth, the conception of the life of the universe and of man is based.

This conception of God, thus completely formulated in the Confession, has been the mainspring of religious progress, yea, of social progress too, through all the ages. It was the fundamental truth of the Old Testament and was especially set forth by the prophets. With early Christianity it met Paganism and triumphed over the false gods of the Pantheon and the petty deities of popular superstition. Within the Church its preservation and expression lay at the bottom of the great theological struggles of the early centuries. The doctrine of the Trinity is its safeguard; for the truth of Christ's divinity kept God from becoming, to religious thought, the unknowable One, and the divinity of the Spirit brought out the fact of His imminent and permanent operation. Later on, the definition of the doctrine of Grace made the idea of God still more clear and taught man his dependence on the good pleasure of his Father. The Papal Church, however, though preserving the doctrine of the Trinity, practically put God away from man by the intervention of lower agencies. Protestantism reinstated the Biblical idea and Calvinism did it most perfectly. It was the constructive idea of Puritanism. Before the latter's conception of God, superstition and tyranny alike went down. The human soul stood in conscious communion with its Maker. Before his revealed will priestcraft and superstition had no terrors. Before his sovereign ownership of the soul, political tyranny had no power. The idea of God, in short, became the motive force of religious and human progress.



And so in the Confession, the authority of God is the determining idea. It begins with the authority of God speaking in the Scriptures, because of which they are the infallible rule of faith and practice. It declares the authority of God exercised in Providence, in accordance with His eternal purpose; so that all history is the fulfillment of His plan. It declares the authority of God in Christian experience, so that by His power Christian life begins, out of His grace salvation flows, and for His glory all things exist. Christianity is the message of a sovereign God to ignorant and sinful man. The fundamental truth about which man's new life must form is reconciliation with His Maker. The glorious character of God, as thus revealed, is at once the guarantee of the truth of the revelation and the ideal of human life.

The effect of this conception upon preaching must necessarily be overwhelming. There is a prevalent type of preaching which simply does not know God. It feels after Him, if haply it may find Him. It discusses problems of ethical culture, but on no definite and assured basis. It seeks by sociological inquiry to discover wherein lies the salvation of men. It is speculative and it is literary. But it does not follow in the footsteps of the Apostle who declared, "We are ambassadors for Christ." Let the preacher, however, once fully grasp the idea of God as formulated at Westminster and he will speak to men in no uncertain tone. Upon the great questions of life and duty he will know that

he has a message. He will be a herald rather than an inquirer; and men in their deep and bitter needs will recognize the voice of God which he repeats and listen as to a word from Heaven.

It follows from this that the Westminster Standards will make preachers who preach salvation by Grace. The Standards are the most complete expression of the doctrines of Grace. Whether they have perfectly embodied in precise proportion every element of the Biblical doctrine, it is not for me now to say; but I do not hesitate to maintain that they are the best expression of the Biblical doctrines of Grace that has ever been penned. In order that these doctrines may hold their place in Christianity they need to be most explicitly understood and taught; for history and experience show how easily they are forgotten. They are not to be confused with mere pietism. They are not to be identified with the use of evangelical phrases. It is idle to expect that they will maintain their integrity in the life of the church unless they are definitely inwrought into the preaching of the day, and this they are not likely to be unless first inwrought into the living creed of the preacher.

It is often said that Calvinistic preaching cannot be evangelistic. Against such an aspersion we emphatically protest. The history of revivals disproves this statement. And the experience of the human mind, when awakened to the consciousness of sin, attests that nothing but the



doctrine of saving grace can meet its need. Just now, however, these doctrines of grace are being put to a severe test. In some pulpits they are not preached at all. We have even known of "revivals" of religion in which the atonement of Christ and man's dependence thereon were not proclaimed. Yet, of all truths which men need to hear, the atonement is the most essential. It was the message of the Apostles. It is the theme of St. Paul. The triumph of Christianity has been the triumph of the Cross. If in our age religion is not to become identical with ethics or superficial in its treatment of human needs, it must proclaim as of old the saving power of the blood which was shed on Calvary. I know not where to hope for the preservation of this essential doctrine of Grace except from the men who are saturated with the theology of the Westminster Standards.

Finally, I add, that the value of the Westminster Standards for the preacher of to-day lies in their power for social righteousness. Notice the stress which they lay upon the Law of God. In the Shorter Catechism forty-three out of one hundred and seven questions, in the Larger Catechism sixty-two out of one hundred and ninety-six questions, deal with the interpretation of the Law. They go to the extent of minute definitions of duty. They were the product of men who believed in the Law of God as the rule of human society; of men who made it the basis for the attempted reconstruction of the world; and who,

therefore, speak in it to our modern age, with its search for social betterment, with cogent and distinct power. Let me only say that there are four great ideas concerning social duties which the Standards enunciate. The first is the individual responsibility of every man for the conformity of his life to the supreme and revealed rule of right. The second is that there is a divine order in human society which men are bound to obey. The third is the duty of obedience to law, first to the divine law and second, so far as consistent with the former, to the law of the State. The fourth is that the ideal of human society is the Kingdom of God on earth and that it is the duty of the Christian man, as an individual and as a member of society, to labor for the realization of the divine kingdom. Now there are no problems more pressing upon our present age than those connected with social progress; and if the preacher of to-day is to meet the cry of the hour for social righteousness, he will be able to do so in no way more effectually than by submitting to the influence of the Westminster Standards. They came from men who were nation-makers. Their history has marked the progress of freedom, the growth of intelligence, the attainment of self-government by the people. Yet they keep man true to a divine ideal. They instruct him in his obligations to eternal law. They will help to secure, so far as they are taught, not the dream of the socialist, but the kingdom of God on earth. There can be no better guide for the



preacher of social righteousness than the words of the law and the Gospel which the Standards declare; and therefore we hope and pray that the young men who are going out from our theological seminaries may incorporate in their preaching the truth of the Bible as it is formulated in these historic Standards of our church. They may well be proud of the history out of which our Standards came and of the vigor with which, under the influence of this faith, our fathers battled with error, advanced the cause of liberty, fostered popular education and directed sinful men in the way to God. But let them not listen to those who say that the new age has gone beyond the Standards. Never was there a time which men needed so sorely to realize definite religious truth, the authority of God, the saving power of the cross and the eternal law of righteousness. The battle of the coming years is likely to be fierce and long. It will be waged not only with open assailants of Christianity, but with those who surrender the essential facts of historic revelation and the definite doctrines of a heaven-sent message. But God knows what the world needs better than the world itself does; and he who, in spite of the "spirit of the age," preaches the old truths, with the vigor of conviction, with the skill of one who knows both his age and the eternal verities which have been revealed for all ages, will find that the world itself will at last come to him and confess that he has the remedy for its ills. Against the

fog of agnostic theology we place the clearly cut outlines of revealed truth. Against the uncertainty of human speculation we place the man who can say, "Thus saith the Lord." Against the inability of ethical culture to save a sinful world we place the cross. In view of the increasing sense of the need of social righteousness we would re-proclaim to high and low the law of the Almighty. This is what the Westminster Standards do. This is what they will make the preacher do. This constitutes their specific value for the man who would so set forth the Bible that it may be a living message from the living God to living, and yet dying, men.





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